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Contras: Our First Line of Defense

With Help, They Will Keep the Soviets at Bay—Terrorists, Too

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Congress must speedily approve military aid to the freedom fighters of Nicaragua (sometimes called *contras*). Further delay will only condemn these brave individuals to a slow defeat and allow the consolidation of a communist state on the American mainland.

Such a consolidation would pose a direct threat to the security of the United States and would only hasten the day when U.S. troops will have to be sent to Central America, no matter who is President.

This threat is twofold. First, the occupation of the Soviet bases now under construction in Nicaragua would give the Soviet Union the ability to cut off the strategic sea lanes that pass through the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. Our North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies and the American forces that are now based in Europe depend on these sea lanes for resupply and reinforcement. Soviet support for the Sandinistas is consistent with their long-time strategic goal of decoupling the United States from our allies in Europe.

A lesson from World War II dramatizes this problem. In 1942 the Nazis sank 263 merchant ships in the Caribbean and the Gulf in just one eight-month period. At that time Cuba, the West Indies and Central America were all in friendly hands. Nazi submarines had to operate from bases in

France, 4,000 miles away. Imagine the situation with Soviet bases in Cuba and Nicaragua and communist control of the Panama Canal.

Soviet bases in Nicaragua are a threat during peacetime as well. The Soviets are now able to fly intelligence-gathering flights over the Eastern Seaboard from bases in Cuba. Bases in Nicaragua would give them, for the first time, the ability to fly all along our West Coast.

We also should not fail to remember that we live in a nuclear age. Should the Soviets attempt to place missiles in Nicaragua, as they did in Cuba in 1960, the world could again be brought to the brink of nuclear confrontation. Why even take such a chance?

The second part of the threat comes not from conventional or nuclear forces, but from irregular warfare in the form of terrorism. Since 1979 Nicaragua has welcomed terrorists from groups as diverse as the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Italian Red Brigades, the Baader-Meinhof gang and the Basque ETA.

Nicaragua is the only nation in this hemisphere with a public-works project named after a terrorist. Two years ago Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega dedicated a new geothermal plant to the memory of Patricio Arguello Ryan, a Sandinista who was killed while participating in a PLO hijacking of an Israeli El Al airliner over Europe in 1970. Most recently the Sandinistas were implicated in aiding the M-19 terrorists in the bloody siege of Colombia's Supreme Court.

Lenin's dictum that "the purpose of terrorism is to terrorize" is being taught to young leftists from throughout this hemisphere. Helping to turn Nicaragua into a terrorists' mecca are advisers from Libya, Syria, Iran, Bulgaria, Cuba, East Germany, North Korea and Vietnam.

The problem that this poses for the United States was illustrated to me during an evening that I spent with immigration authorities along the U.S.-Mexico border near San Diego. That night more than 2,000 illegal immigrants were apprehended while trying to cross; another 2,000 were estimated to have made it. The Immigration and Naturalization Service reports that people from all over the world are flocking to Mexico in hopes of crossing the porous border. U.S. authorities are catching an increasing number of Palestinians, Asians and Africans.

The terrorists who are harbored by Nicaragua are a diverse lot, but they are united in their hate of this country. Operating here is their ultimate dream, and unless the freedom fighters are successful, it is only a matter of time before the terrorists will be among us.

In addition, we will suffer a security threat from illegal immigration of the ordinary kind. Should the communists destabilize Mexico, as is their professed goal, millions of refugees will try to enter this country.

Today tens of thousands of Nicaraguans sit in refugee camps waiting for the United States to help provide them with the wherewithal to liberate their nation. While it is morally correct for us to assist those who fight to bring political and economic justice and political plurality to Nicaragua, it is also in our national interest to deny the Soviets and the international terrorists this base for operations against the American people.

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